



Lontar Newsletter

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September, 2025

Greetings

For many if not most Indonesians (especially those of us who were born before 1965), “September 30” has negative connotations. Not surprisingly, since it was on the night of that day, sixty years ago, when seven high military officials were kidnapped and later killed—an act of that led to the killing of hundreds of thousands of people in the months and years ahead.

As sad as that may be, September 30 is also International Translation Day (ITD), which, with a resolution passed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2017, became a day to recognize the key role translation plays in connecting nations. Each year, a unifying theme for ITD is chosen and this year’s theme is “Language Technologies for All.” Coincidentally, the United Nations also declared 2025 as the “International Year of Peace and Trust,” a resolution that recognizes the need to prevent and resolve conflict through dialogue and diplomacy.

In turbulent times, where peace often hangs in the balance and global communications and relations are influenced by a lack of trust, this year’s ITD theme highlights the important role of human trust. Specifically, the role of translators in ensuring trustworthy communication, building dialogue and trust between parties, and providing oversight to AI-generated text and machine translation.

While translator-interpreters in global negotiations may not be visible, we know that such high-stakes conversations could not happen without them and could certainly not be entrusted to technology. So too in the field of literature where, without translators,

Ruminations

Toer’s Tour

For a time, it didn’t look like there would be no tour. The idea for Pramoedya to visit the U.S. was planted as early as January 1995 when Christopher GoGwilt, of Fordham University, came to Jakarta to interview Pramoedya.

By mid-1996, I had managed to translate all 800+ pages of Pramoedya’s Buru-Island notes and when, in September of that year, Will Schwalbe came to Indonesia with delegates from the American Publishers Association, we met to discuss which sections of the draft might be included in what would become *The Mute’s Soliloquy*.

Thereafter began a series of interviews with Pramoedya in which my many questions were so specific that his answers could be strung together to become introductions to each of the four major sections of the book.

A six-week scholar-in-resident grant from Leiden University in mid-1997 gave me the necessary time and peace of mind required to produce the near-final text, which I sent to Will Schwalbe near the end of that year. (He was now at Hyperion East.) Will was enthusiastic about the results and now the burden of producing the book rested mostly on his shoulders. I was thankful for that because I had my own burden to bear. The Asian Economic Crisis had decimated Lontar’s finances and I was working 24/7 trying to keep Lontar afloat, which led to a fund-raising drive in the U.S. in May 1998, with events Washington, D.C., New York, and San Francisco.

When in New York, I met with Will again. The text of the book was basically finished but, what with layout, design, fact-checking, and so on, it would not be until the end of that year before it would be ready for print and another several months before promotional copies were ready for distribution. He introduced me to Chris GoGwilt who suggested

holding a conference on “The Voice of Pramoedya Ananta Toer” at the time of the book’s release. “It would be great if Pramoedya and Joesoef Isak could attend. Would you discuss this possibility with them?” Chris asked.



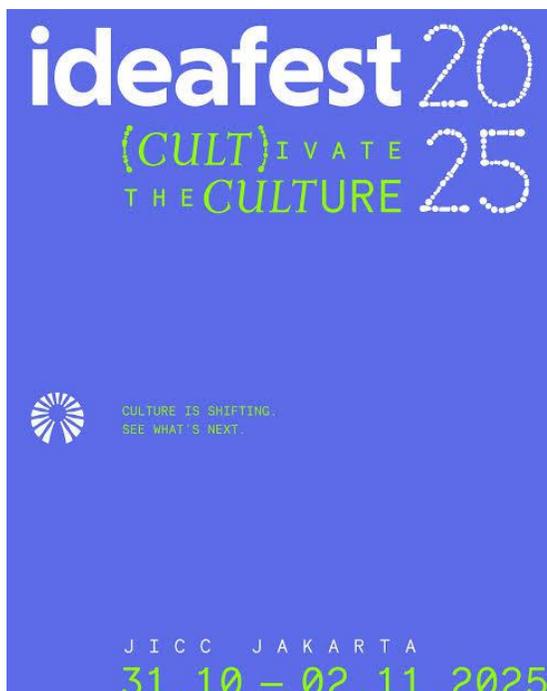
Will Schwalbe and Pramoedya in September 1996.

there would be no cross-cultural dialogue.

The date, September 30, was chosen as ITD because it is the day of the feast of Saint Jerome, the Bible translator, who is considered the patron saint of translators. Try to imagine, if you will, the role that translations of the Bible, the Quran, and other major religious texts have played in uniting cultures worldwide. But then, think too of the influence of literary masterpieces on world cultures—the works of Shakespeare, the *Mahabharata*, *1001 Nights*, and so on—how they have served to illuminate cross-cultural understanding. Where would be without “translation”? And now we must ask where is Indonesia on the world stage if its written work is not translated into other languages?

With Lontar’s 38th anniversary on the horizon—October 28—let us give praise to all translators of Indonesian texts, not just the literary but to the non-literary as well. Please help to keep Lontar’s mission alive.

Yuli Ismartono (yismartono@lontar.org)



I told him I would but doubted if Pram would accept the invitation, least not with Soeharto still in power. (Little did we know that only days later, on May 21, the president would step down from his throne.)

In mid-June, shortly after my return to Indonesia, I met with Pramodya and Joesoef. While the latter was all for a trip to the U.S. and beyond, the former was reluctant. The mayhem that followed Soeharto’s abdication frightened Pramodya, reminding him of the havoc in 1965. Whenever he left his home, he still saw unmarked cars on his tail and muscular men with crewcuts in civilian clothing ready to abduct him.

I informed Will and Chris of Pram’s decision. Though disappointed, the two continued to work on plans for the conference. Every time I met Pram in the months ahead, I would repeat the invitation but his answer remained the same.

On the evening of January 27, 1999, I was at the home of a friend in Seminyak, Bali. Earlier that day, I had come from Kupang, West Timor, where I’d been conducting a survey for the World Bank on the potential use of “creative communities” in stoking local economic development.

After a shower, I was ready to party and was singing along with Cher, who was belting out “Do you believe in love after love” on my friend’s CD player, when the telephone rang. Surprisingly, the call was for me. It was from my sister, Maureen, whose voice faltered when she told me I had to come home. Our father was dying from a rapidly spreading cancer. In previous weeks, he had been in the Veteran’s Hospital in Madison, Wisconsin, for treatment, but was now home, permanently; the doctors had said there was no hope.

Obviously, there was no clubbing for me that night. Rather, the first flight back to Jakarta and, after that, onward flights to Madison.

Bedraggled and bleary-eyed, I arrived at the Madison airport on the evening of January 29 where Maureen’s husband David was waiting to take me to Glynnspring. After a quick stop at a liquor store, we drove north and entered the driveway at Glynnspring at around 10 pm.

My father was unconscious when I entered my parent’s bedroom where a hospital bed had been installed for him but his eyes flickered, as if in recognition of my arrival, when I gripped his hand and kissed him on his forehead. My infirmed mother was in another bed next to his.

My parents had had a lengthy premarital courtship, from 1937 to 1944, during which time they exchanged more than a thousand letters. I’d recently finished transcribing their letters and had brought home printouts with me. In the hours ahead, as my father lay dying, my siblings and I took turns reading their love letters out loud. We laughed, we cried, and, yes, we drank, then sobbed when, at 3 AM, January 30, the family patriarch left this world.

Soon after my return to Indonesia in mid-February, Maemunah called to

UPCOMING!

UBUD WRITERS & READERS FESTIVAL



The Ubud Writers & Readers Festival (UWRF) returns this year with a stellar lineup of authors and thinkers. Taking place from 29 October to 2 November 2025, the theme of this year's festival is *Aham Brahmasmi*, a Sanskrit concept that has been translated as 'I am the Universe,' facilitating conversations that explore the relationship between the individual and the cosmos.

Since its inception, UWRF has been praised worldwide for its diverse and intimate program. With author talks and panel discussions, writing workshops and literary lunches, poetry slams and late-night musical events, there is something for everyone at the festival.

The lineup of literary luminaries is one of the festival's main draws and this year's roster includes Indian author Banu Mushtaq, co-winner of the 2025 International Booker Prize, and Belgian writer David Van Reybrouck, author of *Revolusi*, which unravels Indonesia's fight for freedom after three centuries of Dutch colonial rule. From Indonesia are frontrunners in Indonesia's contemporary fiction scene, including Dee (Dewi Lestari), Leila S. Chudori, and several other Indonesian authors whose work Lontar has published.

This year's recipient UWRF's Lifetime Achievement Award is Taufiq Ismail whose collection of poetry, *Reading the Signs*, is due out from Lontar very soon.

say that Pram had changed his mind; he was willing to participate in the conference at Fordham, after all, and would be interested in traveling to other cities as well.

In the days before the internet it would have been impossible to arrange an international tour on such short notice but, with the web and the assistance of numerous parties, chiefly Will and Chris, we put together a two-month tour that took Pramoedy, Maemunah, and Joesoef to ten cities in North America. With dozens of book signings and public events in each of these cities, along with numerous interviews, private sight-seeing tours, tens of dinners and receptions, and medical checkups as well, the tour was, if measured by media coverage, a huge success.

Upon the group's return to Jakarta, I asked Pram what the highlight of the trip had been—perhaps the private tour of the White House; the Fordham seminar; the standing ovation at the Asia Society; the honorary doctoral degree he'd received at Ann Arbor; or what? Pram didn't hesitate when he answered, "*Kampungnya* John. Your home. John."

On Saturday, May 8, after two days of events in Madison, Wisconsin, "Pram and Co." had come to Glynnspring together with friends from the University of Wisconsin. After a walk around the farm, all present gathered inside the house for a potluck meal followed and a reading by me of translations of several letters Pram had written to his children.



Glynnspring when reading Pramoedy's letters. L-R: Kathleen McGlynn Shadick, Katie Shadick, JHM, Anna Marie McGlynn

It was not just my recently deceased father in the back of my mind when, at the end of the reading, I broke into tears. It was the love so very apparent in Pram's words to his children—the same deep affection found in my parent's letters. When wiping away my tears, I saw that all in the room were teary-eyed, as well. Pram embraced me and, through his own tears, thanked me. This was the first time, he said, he had heard "his" words to his children since he wrote them.

With that, the weight I had felt when taking on the task of translating his notes finally lifted.

John McGlynn (john_mcglynn@lontar.org)



KEITH FOULCHER is former member of the Department of Indonesian Studies at the University of Sydney. Prior to his retirement in 2006 he taught Indonesian language and literature at the University of Sydney, and previously held positions at Monash University in Melbourne and Flinders University in Adelaide, South Australia. His major research interests and publications are in the field of modern Indonesian literature and cultural history, especially of the late colonial and early independence periods. His publications include *Indonesian Notebook: A Sourcebook on Richard Wright and the Bandung Conference* (co-edited with Brian Russell Roberts), *Clearing a Space: Postcolonial Readings of Modern Indonesian Literature* (co-edited with Tony Day), and *Words in Motion: Language and Discourse in Post-New Order Indonesia* (co-edited with Mikihiro Moriyama and Manneke Budiman). Since his retirement, he has also been active in the field of literary translation. His translations include the trilogy of works by Putu Oka Sukanta, *Threads of Dignity*, *The Turning Wheel*, and *Spaces* (The Lontar Foundation, 2019, 2022) and, most recently, the novel *Larasati* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer (co-translated with Brian Russel Roberts).

Surat dari Pejompongan

TUNA

Kawan Moer,

Aku selalu gandrung akan keindahan alam dan hasil kerja manusia. Yang pertama biasa disebut *nature*, yang kedua *culture*. Di setiap tempat mana pun yang pernah kukunjungi, selalu ada yang bisa kunikmati—makanan, tentu saja. Apakah itu namanya air terjun di Cuban Rondo, Jawa Timur, atau laut yang selalu biru di sekitar Kupang, Ternate, Bangka. Atau, kabut yang menggenang di atas perbukitan sebagaimana kudapati di Lampung Barat.

Alam seperti itu bersifat terberi. Alam itu sudah hadir begitu saja ketika manusia dilahirkan. Artinya, manusia menerima saja berkah tersebut. Tanpa kerja keras manusia, semua penampakan alam itu sudah dengan sendirinya bagus. Manusia tinggal merawat dan memanfaatkannya.

Tetapi, bentang alam macam demikian ada batas daya tahannya. Ia bisa rusak, bahkan hancur, jika manusia tidak bisa merawatnya. Sudah terbukti, orang kita tidak mampu merawat alam yang indah. Selalu ada kepentingan lain yang mendesak ke dalamnya. Apakah itu kapitalisme perkebunan atau pertambangan, atau godaan pariwisata yang membuat segala yang indah itu diutak-atik menjadi artifisial atau rusak dalam jangka waktu tertentu.

Namun, yang juga kukagumi adalah bagaimana manusia membangun sesuatu yang baru, yang menunjukkan bagaimana peradaban dan kebudayaan bangsa-bangsa di dunia ini bekerja. Jika kita mendatangi Candi Borobudur atau Perambanan, atau candi-candi era Majapahit di Jawa Timur, kita akan mendapatkan kenyataan penting yang mestinya menggugah kesadaran kita. Bagaimana orang di masa lalu membangun semua itu?

Aku pernah ke Keraton Ratu Boko, tiga kilometer dari kawasan Candi Perambanan. Bagaimana Ratu Boko—apakah ia benar-benar ada?—membangun semua itu di ketinggian bukit? Apa teknologi yang digunakan untuk membawa batu-batu besar yang masih menopang gerbang keraton tersebut? Hari ini mungkin orang akan menggunakan kren (crane) untuk memindahkan batu-batu ke puncak bukit. Tapi pada abad ke-8, teknologi apa yang digunakan? Mungkin dengan memanfaatkan kekuatan gajah atau kuda.

Semua ini sebenarnya ada jawabnya, tetapi bukan itu yang penting. Yang perlu kita sadari kemudian adalah bahwa manusia berusaha menciptakan hal-hal baru, yang tidak diberikan oleh alam. Dari mana bahan semua itu? Dengan mengeksploitasi alam. Mau dari mana lagi. Batu-batu besar digali dari sungai dan gunung, lantas ditata untuk membangun istana dan candi. Alam harus dikorbankan agar

IN MEMORIAM



Courtesy of Cornell Southeast Asia Program

Anyone who knows of gamelan music, most certainly knows the name “Martin ‘Marty’ Hatch” who died this past August 23. Marty got his PhD at Cornell University and then stayed as a professor of ethnomusicology for over 40 years where he devoted his career to the study and teaching of Indonesian music, particularly the gamelan traditions of Java and Bali. His work was instrumental in introducing generations of students and scholars in the United States to the richness of Indonesian musical heritage. Through his scholarship, teaching, and leadership in performance ensembles, he helped establish gamelan as a vibrant and enduring presence on university campuses across the country.

Marty’s legacy in the field of Indonesian studies is profound. He not only advanced the academic study of gamelan music but also nurtured deep cultural exchange and understanding between Indonesia and the United States. In 2012, he played a key role in establishing the American Institute for Indonesian Studies (AIFIS), which continues to support scholars and foster connections between the two nations. His dedication inspired countless students to pursue research in Indonesian arts and culture, many of whom have carried forward his vision of bridging communities through music. His contributions will continue to resonate in classrooms, concert halls, and among the scholarly community for generations to come.

manusia bisa membangun peradaban dan kebudayaan. Manusia lain harus ditaklukkan, kolonialisme harus dimulai, dan seterusnya.

Di kota-kota tua di Eropa—Praha salah satunya—apa yang telah menjadi pencapaian budaya manusia itu masih bisa kita nikmati dengan baik dan nyaris lengkap. Jika sebuah situs pernah hancur oleh perang, maka generasi berikutnya akan membangunkannya kembali. Mungkin dengan meniru apa yang sudah hancur, atau menciptakan sesuatu yang sama sekali baru. Dengan kata lain, penciptaan sesuatu yang baru selalu punya kaitan dengan masa silam, semacam proses yang berkelanjutan, sebuah *continuum*.

Masalahnya, di kita, orang kita ini, punya ingatan sejarah sangat pendek atau memang menderita amnesia permanen. Apa-apa yang telah menjadi pencapaian di masa lalu, tidak mendapatkan haknya untuk hidup sebagaimana yang dibangun hari ini. Cukup banyak situs-situs sejarah yang dihancurkan atau dibiarkan terbengkalai. Bekas gudang VOC di kawasan Kota Tua, misalnya, dibiarkan mangkrak begitu saja, jadi bagian dari hunian warga.

Orang Indonesia memang tuna sejarah. Itu adalah ketunaan yang paling berbahaya jika dibandingkan dengan ketunaan yang lain-lain. Tidak ada penghargaan kepada apa yang masih tersisa dari masa silam. Jika warga kebanyakan yang mengidap itu, kita masih bisa maklum. Tapi bagaimana jika yang mengidap itu adalah pejabat kota atau negara? Akan berat betul jadinya. Mereka tidak akan tahu mana yang harus diselamatkan dari masa lalu, mana pula yang perlu dibangun untuk masa depan.

Menoleh ke masa lalu saja tidak bisa, bagaimana harus menatap masa depan yang entah di mana itu. Sebuah kota, pada akhirnya, mesti dibangun dengan kesadaran ganda. Menjadikan masa lalu sebagai jangkar dan masa depan sebagai anjang-ancang hari ini. Apa yang kita bangun hari ini akan dinilai oleh juru nilai dari masa depan. Begitu, Bung. **Zen Hae** (zenhae@lontar.org)

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